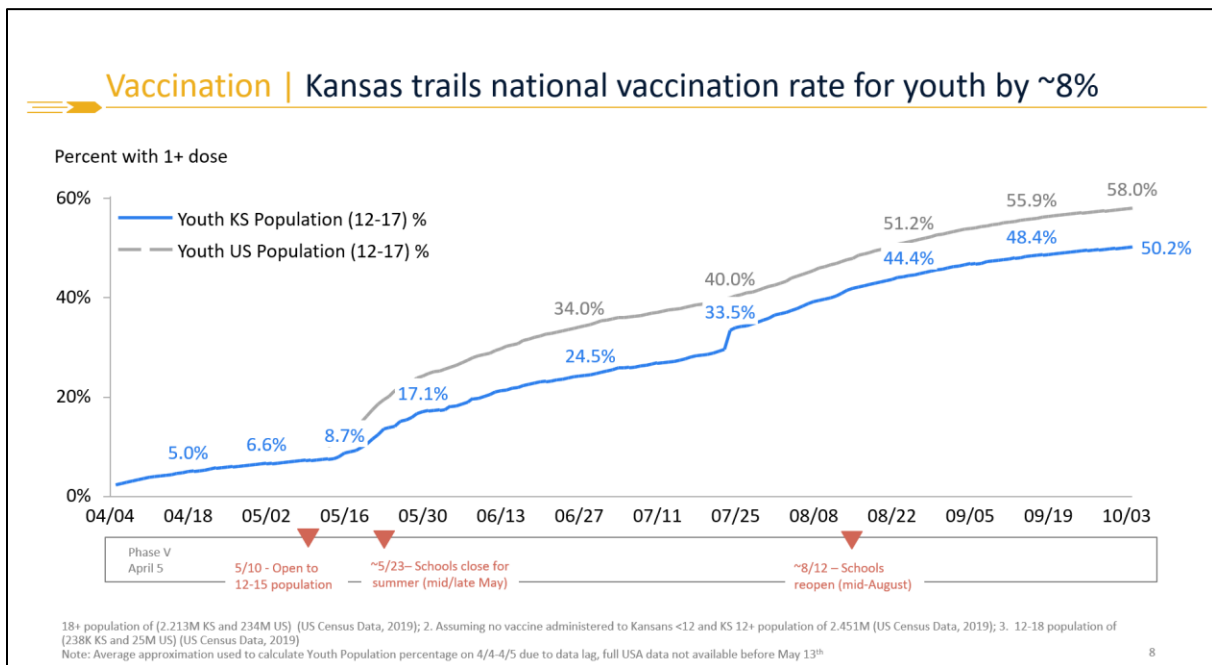


SAFER CLASSROOMS WORKGROUP
Weekly Report
October 6th, 2021

Dr. Jennifer Bacani-McKenney and Dr. Stephanie Kuhlmann, co-chairs of the Governor's Safer Classrooms Workgroup, led the Workgroup discussion on improved reporting from schools around masking requirements; the difference in outcomes across masking and non-masking schools; updates from schools including the burden of contact tracing in non-masking school settings; the recent clinical perspective and role of providers; and the launch of the K-12 COVID-19 Dashboard.



COVID-19 school metrics summary

The Workgroup reviewed the latest data pertaining to Kansas schoolchildren and discussed the importance of using the three key public health tools to keep schools safely open:

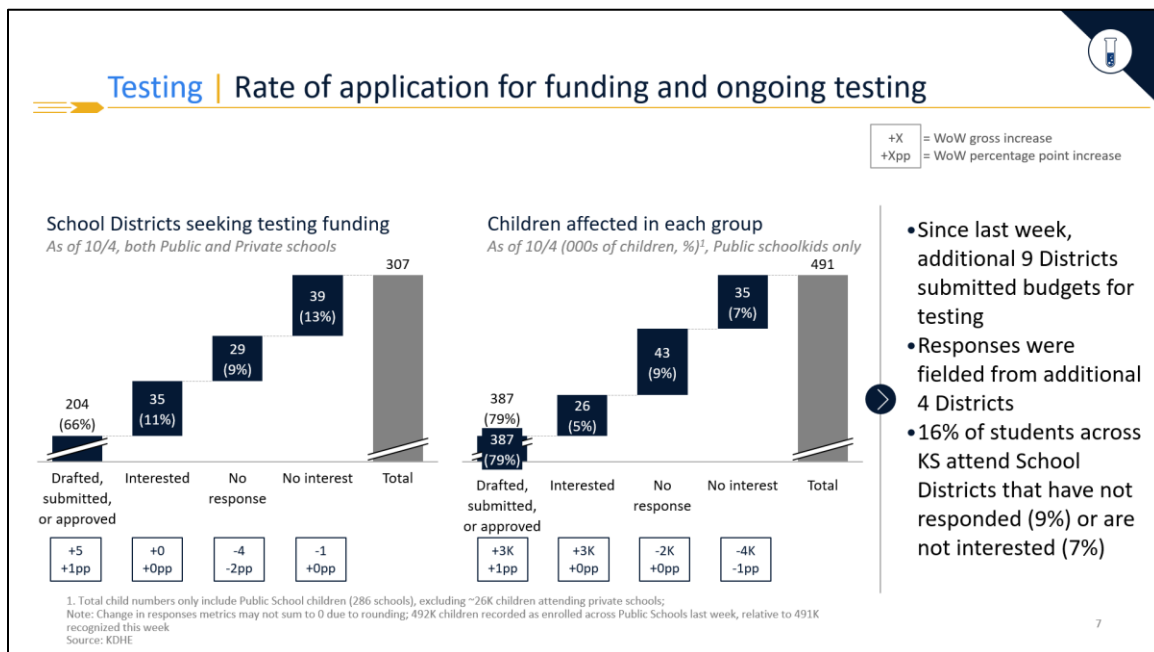
- Vaccination:** Kansas eligible youth vaccination rate (~50%) continues to trail the national eligible youth vaccination rate (~58%) by eight percentage points. The rate of vaccination across the state of Kansas has increased recently due to the announced expanded approval of booster doses. The FDA will meet on October 26 as an advisory committee on the extension of emergency use authorization of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine to five-to-eleven-year-olds.
- Testing:** Nine additional School Districts submitted budgets for testing since last week, and four more School Districts responded to the initial outreach on testing support. About 79% of Kansan students now attend school in Districts that have drafted, submitted, or been approved for testing budgets. At this time, 16% of Kansan students attend school where no response has been received or where the District has expressed no interest in testing funding for students. As of this last week, 121 School Districts are reporting testing results to KDHE, an increase of six Districts since last week; 427 positive tests were

reported across 47 School Districts. More School Districts conducted PCR tests this week relative to last week.

3. **Masking:** This week, 101 additional School Districts responded to KDHE's masking survey, contributing to more robust data on school policies and corresponding outcomes. Currently, 46% of Districts are implementing a policy of encouraging but not requiring masks (25% of Kansan students); 16% of School Districts have a mask requirement for all students (56% of students); 15% of School Districts have no mask policy (6% of students); 19% of Districts have not yet responded to the survey (7% of students).

There were 79 active outbreaks in KS schools as of this week, corresponding to 648 cases related to outbreaks; this compares to 72 active outbreaks last week, with 537 associated cases. Looking at outbreak-related cases per 100,000 students, School Districts with mask requirements had 53 outbreak cases per 100,000. School Districts with masks encouraged or no mask policies had roughly five times the number of outbreak cases per 100,000 students, at 249 cases.

Why this matters and what this means: The Workgroup members' efforts to improve School Districts' reporting on their policies to protect kids against COVID-19 in schools have contributed to more robust data on masking available this week. Complete data on protective measures implemented by schools will help inform the policy decisions of parents, school boards, and School District leadership as they seek to keep kids safe and in school. The [KDHE K-12 COVID-19 Dashboard](#) is now live and available to the public; the data will be refreshed on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays to help provide up-to-date information to school boards, School District leadership, physicians, policymakers, parents, and other child advocates (*see final section*).



View from Schools

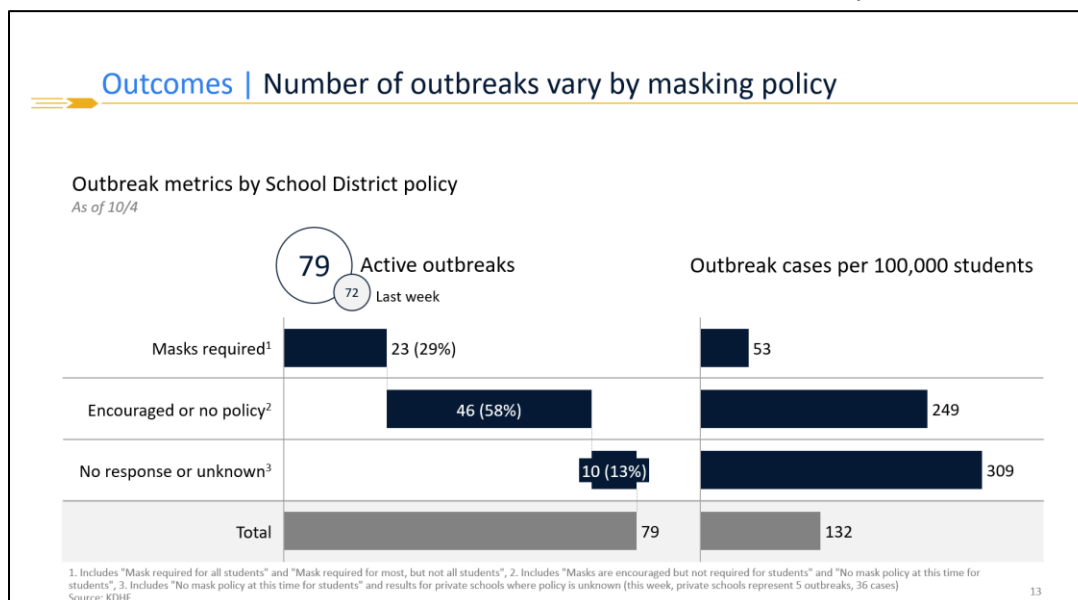
This week, 101 more School Districts responded to the survey on masking policies, but the rate of vaccination among school-age children continues to trail the national average by about eight percentage points. More schools are also finalizing their applications for testing funding this week as the benefits of consistent testing programs, including reducing the number of missed school days among children, becomes apparent.

Topics discussed:

- Vaccination rates among school-age children in Kansas remain lower than masking rates and testing rates; Dr. Randy Watson challenged the group and listeners to strategize on how to grow vaccination rate among eligible Kansan youth.
- Pediatricians will be seeing many KS schoolchildren through the coming weeks as school deadlines for other vaccination requirements approach; these appointments present an opportunity for providers to have conversations with families about getting the COVID-19 vaccination in tandem with other vaccines.
- The Workgroup discussed the importance of consistent messaging among parents and families; in Sedgwick, the LHD provided guidance on testing strategies in-schools, providing flow-charts and graphics to help explain to parents the high- and low-risk options. This helped create consistent messaging across the County and helped clarify School Districts' choices around testing.
- Contact tracing efforts in schools without mask mandates are a heavier lift than when masks are required; this effort was unsustainable in Wichita and the more recent County mask requirement has reduced the burden of contact tracing efforts. In smaller schools, extensive contact-tracing efforts can overwhelm nursing staff, requiring administrative staff and educators to support on tracing efforts.
- The Workgroup discussed the pressure on School Board members that can make decision-making and policy-setting challenging.

Why this matters and what this means:

- Vaccination remains an important preventive measure to protect children in schools; the impending emergency use authorization extension to five-to-eleven-year-olds will make this measure even more effective by reducing the number of ineligible youths in schools.
- The increase in the number of School Districts submitting applications for testing funding indicates more students will be covered by the program in the coming weeks; School Districts interested in the program are encouraged to reach out to KDHE to receive testing support from dedicated project specialists.
- The Workgroup reinforced their support of School Districts implementing mask requirements both to protect children from the spread of COVID-19 as well as to reduce the burden on nurses, administrators, and educators in the case of a confirmed case of COVID-19 in the student body.



View from Health care providers

Dr. Farah Ahmed presented data on case rates among school-age children over time, sharing that case rates have declined since a spike in late August when kids were first returning to schools. There have been three deaths among school-age children since the beginning of the pandemic. The Workgroup discussed the critical role of pediatricians / PCPs / family physicians and recent data from the CDC on the relationship between the COVID-19 vaccine and COVID-19 hospitalizations among adolescents and teens.

Topics discussed:

- A small percentage of children have exemptions from vaccines mandated for school attendance, suggesting that parents are not necessarily vaccine-hesitant but instead COVID-19-vaccine-hesitant. If unaddressed, this hesitancy may negatively implicate the administration of other, routine vaccinations.
- Children in rural or sparsely populated areas might not have close access to a pediatric provider to receive their COVID-19 vaccine. The Workgroup discussed the importance of having good data on which Counties / School Districts might be underserved from a provider perspective, to ensure all children have equitable access to the vaccine.
- The CDC recently released a [report in the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report](#) indicating that hospitalization rates in teens and adolescents were ten times higher among the unvaccinated. This relationship between vaccination and hospitalization provides further evidence that vaccination helps protect children against COVID-19.

Why this matters and what this means:

- The Workgroup discussed the critical role that pediatricians and other trusted providers play in answering families' questions on the COVID-19 vaccine to get comfortable choosing to have their child vaccinated. The recent CDC report data should help motivate hesitant parents to protect their kids from hospitalization by getting their children vaccinated.
- School Districts that suspect their student bodies may have limited access to care are encouraged to reach out to KDHE for vaccination support.
- The Workgroup asked Dr. Farah Ahmed to help establish a view on areas of the state that might have limited access to pediatric providers to help focus targeted efforts where kids' access to vaccine administrators might be limited.
- The Workgroup will monitor for newly released studies and reports as more data becomes available on the outcomes of school policies and family choices.

Updates from last week:

The Workgroup discussed the publicly available [K-12 COVID-19 Dashboard](#) now available online. The Dashboard shows COVID-19 cases and vaccination rate by School District during the last 14 days among 5-to-17-year-olds; children were matched to School Districts based on their zip code.

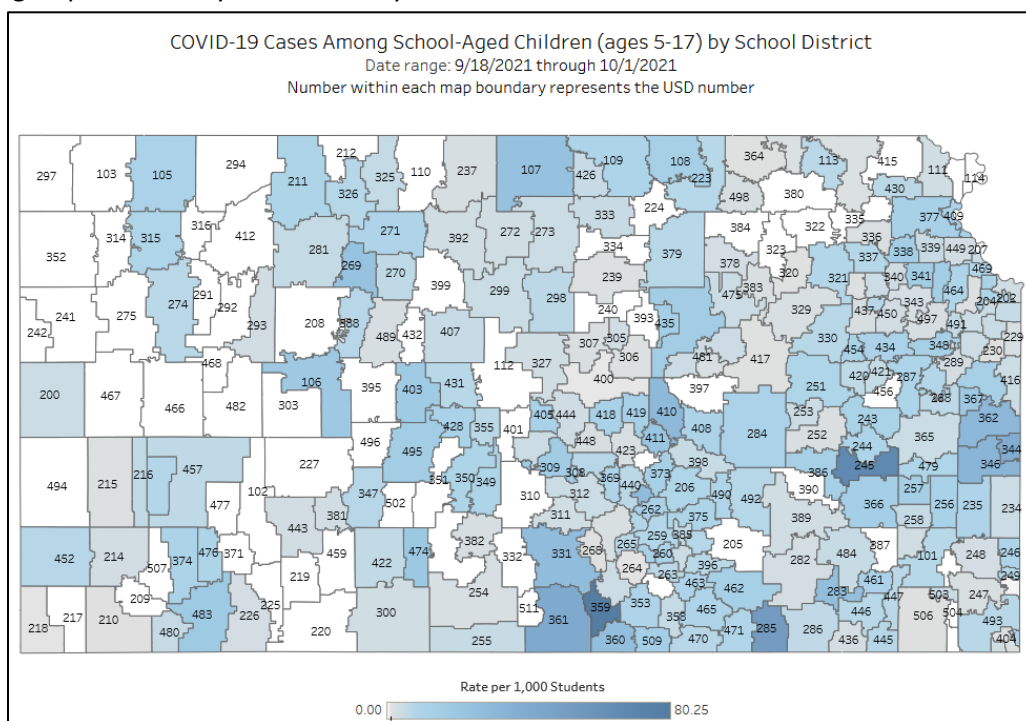
Topics discussed:

- The first map shows presumed student case rates in each district as well as total enrollment and rate per 100,000 students.
- The second map shows the gross number of vaccinated children in each School District region, as well as the rate of vaccinated children per 100,000. It is important to note that only children 12 and older are eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine currently.

- The final view includes a table of the data feeding the Dashboard's two maps. This data can be downloaded for use by any who wish to further analyze the state of COVID-19 in Kansas's K-12 schools.

Why this matters and what this means:

- The Workgroup discussed the usefulness of the K-12 COVID-19 Dashboard in maintaining transparency on the status of COVID-19 among schoolchildren in each area of the state.
- School Districts, school boards, and other child advocates are encouraged to use this live data to inform their decisions on policies to keep kids safe and in school. This data can also be leveraged to help School Districts and school boards assess who has had success combatting the virus and reach out for key learnings.
- The Workgroup will consider any additional data that may be useful to help guide decision-making among School Districts and school boards; these bodies are encouraged to reach out to members of the Workgroup should they like to see any additional data included in the K-12 COVID-19 Dashboard.



The Safer Classrooms Workgroup will meet next on October 13, 2021. The meeting will be livestreamed on the Governor's YouTube channel.

Workgroup members:

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